



## Fishery Improvement Projects

### What is a Fishery Improvement Project?

A FIP is an alliance of stakeholders – retailers, processors, producers and catchers – that comes together to resolve problems within a specific fishery or improve some specific aspect of the fishery that requires attention. The FIP works through key organizations and individuals, talking through the management of the fishery and the challenges that it may face, identifying data that needs to be collected, agreeing on a set of priority actions that should be undertaken and then overseeing an action plan.

The organization of the FIP can vary depending on the circumstances. It's possible for the FIP to have a completely separate identity, employ a secretariat and develop established funding arrangements. Alternatively it might be relatively "light touch" in terms of administration and simply rely on regular meetings of key participants with a coordination role played by one of the members such as Sustainable Fisheries Partnership.

Some FIPs may make good progress as an alliance of catchers and other local stakeholders only. SFP focuses on FIPs where international suppliers and their customers have a key role to play.

All fisheries are different and consequently it's necessary to create a FIP that suits the needs of the fishery as well as the local culture where the fishery is located.

### How does a FIP work?

Although FIPs can vary a lot in terms of size and structure, they all need to carry out certain tasks if they are to succeed:

**Formation of the FIP** – A FIP is generally formed through the enthusiasm and interest of a number of players within the supply chain that have a stake in a particular fishery such as catchers, processors, retailers, regulators and scientists. Once an initial core has formed it will typically reach out to other key players and invite them to participate. The administrative arrangements for a FIP are highly flexible and reflect local conditions. SFP will make itself available to organise initial coordination functions but FIPs do not have to include SFP and may work with other not-for-profit partners.

In FIPs where international supply chain and retailer engagement is sought, SFP can assist in connecting local FIP participants to interested international buyers.

**Data assessment** – Data assessment is a process whereby all of the data that currently exists is located and brought together. The process has two key outcomes – early indications of potential challenges to the fishery and the identification of missing data required to create an effective management plan in the future.

**Fishery Assessment** – The fishery assessment is aimed at identifying the challenges that face a particular fishery. One of the first challenges might be generating the data required to actually create a meaningful assessment. The assessment process (assuming adequate data is available) will characterize the state of the fishery and identify the specific issues that need to be addressed. Sometimes the fishery assessment might be part of a pre-assessment for Marine Stewardship Council certification or similar scheme but this is not always appropriate or desirable.

**Agreement of a work plan** – After the assessment has been completed it will be necessary for the FIP to examine the challenges identified by the report and agree an action plan for achieving improvements in the future. Such improvements might include the generation of data on stocks and landings, better administrative arrangements for managing the fishery, the use of modified gear types, the creation and enforcement of catch limits and so on. One of the key functions of the work plan is to set clear priorities for tasks and assign responsibilities to those who will carry them out.

**Creation of a monitoring procedure** – In parallel to the creation of a work plan it is essential that the FIP create a monitoring system to ensure that activity can be effectively measured and reported on. Such a system will rely on the use of indicators for each element of the work plan with clear timetables and a mechanism for formally reporting progress to every member of the FIP via written reports and regular meetings. This procedure is extremely important to the successful functioning of the FIP (and acquires even greater importance if required to report to external funders).

**Implementation** – After the creation of a work plan and monitoring system the FIP will then function according to a routine agreed by members – typically including regular meetings of the FIP and any specialist sub-groups (such as fundraising or technical issues) – which will review progress, approve reports and generally oversee the conduct of the work plan. Ordinarily, there will be an annual assessment of progress to date (or more frequently if required by funders).

### **Evaluating FIP progress**

In order to show whether FIP improvement efforts are producing actual results SFP has developed a “FIP Improvement Tracker,” which groups these common FIP tasks into a series of progressive steps or stages. For each stage, there are specific indicators.

**Stage 1** – FIP is being launched: The fishery has been evaluated, improvement options are identified and corporate partners engaged, with this information publicly available.

**Stage 2** – FIP is formed: The stakeholders have met and formed either a formal partnership or informal alliance, and developed a work plan for improvements on which they all agree.

**Stage 3** – Encouraging improvements: The FIP members are pressing regulators for improvements and adopting better product specifications and procurement policies.

**Stage 4** – Delivering improvements in policies and/or fishing practices: There have been improvements in government policy or fishery management, better compliance with the existing management plan, or improvements in fishing practices.

**Stage 5** – Delivering improvements in the water: There have been positive trends in key scientific indicators (biomass, fishing mortality, and compliance with fishery management).

**Stage 6** – Fishery is MSC certified: Achieving MSC certification is desired, but not absolutely a requirement for a FIP. There are of course definite benefits of MSC certification, such as having an independent third party verify the results of a FIP.

The FIP stages and their indicators are summarized in Diagram 1 below. More information on these indicators and tracking FIP progress can be found at <http://www.fishsource.org/faqs?group=Fishery+Improvement+Projects>.

It is worth emphasizing that the Improvement Tracker is solely concerned with measuring progress and does not define how much progress is “enough.” Defining how much progress is enough and over what timescale is a judgment that FIP participants and other stakeholders have to make themselves.

Additionally, it is important to know that while the stages normally occur in this sequence, this is not necessary. For example, it may happen that suppliers are organised and engaging the fishery – Stage 2 – while the evaluation of the fishery and identification of the improvement options is not yet public. Or a supplier working in the very early stages of a FIP may already be making efforts to improve policies and fishing practices, which are normally expected later, at Stage 3. If they succeed, as is sometimes the case, then a FIP may achieve Stage 4 before other companies join the FIP or a FIP is formally announced. In short, FIPs can be flexible in how they progress.

SFP advises FIPs to try and achieve Stage 4 results as early as possible, since reaching Stage 4 indicates with a high degree of confidence that the FIP is generating real and measurable benefits.

### **Who can join a FIP?**

The most effective members of a FIP are those organizations and individuals that have a financial stake in the fishery, specialist technical knowledge, a regulatory duty, or can require certain practices through product specifications and procurement policies. It is not encouraged to include other interests such as campaigning NGOs or bodies that only have a marginal interest in the specific fishery because they are

unlikely to have the knowledge, focus and influence required to achieve practical change in the conduct of the fishery.

It is a responsibility of FIP members to constantly search for organizations that might be useful members and contribute to the institutional capacity of the FIP.

### **Timescales**

The timescales for a FIP (and associated work plan) are highly variable and have to be agreed by the FIP members themselves. There are no set guidelines for how quickly FIP work plans are implemented but it is recommended that FIPs should focus on short term practical changes that are clearly achievable rather than long term ambitions which may remain far in the future.

There is no common fixed point for when FIPs should end. Some may choose some form of certification such as MSC but even then there may be room for improvement (i.e., to ensure fisheries meet MSC requirements unconditionally).

### **Funding**

Operating FIPs inevitably involves financial costs although these can vary very widely between fisheries. Typical costs will relate to administration, research and assessments. There is no fixed model for how to fund a FIP but there are a number of options available including contributions from commercial organizations involved in the FIP and support from funding bodies interested in improving fisheries. The FIP itself is responsible for assessing potential costs and identifying possible funding sources.

A well-funded FIP will be able to move relatively rapidly, for instance in obtaining technical advice or installing new capacity, such as data management or vessel monitoring systems. However, even FIPs with limited funding should be able to make progress on select key challenges.

### **Communications**

The communication of FIP activities to external audiences is an important part of FIP operations but there are also constraints. Some parts of FIP discussions may touch on areas of commercial sensitivity so there is no value in making all FIP proceedings completely transparent. On the other hand it is extremely important to explain what the FIP is and what it is doing to a wide range of audiences and the regular publication of information about FIP achievements should be considered a core function of the group.

### **Conclusion**

Fisheries Improvement Projects represent a way for stakeholders within a fishery to engage in dialogue and agree future actions with others that share a common interest in a productive marine eco-system. The organization of FIPs is highly flexible but the key elements are common to all – the creation and use of reliable data, the

rigorous identification of challenges and strict prioritization of tasks along with comprehensive reporting.

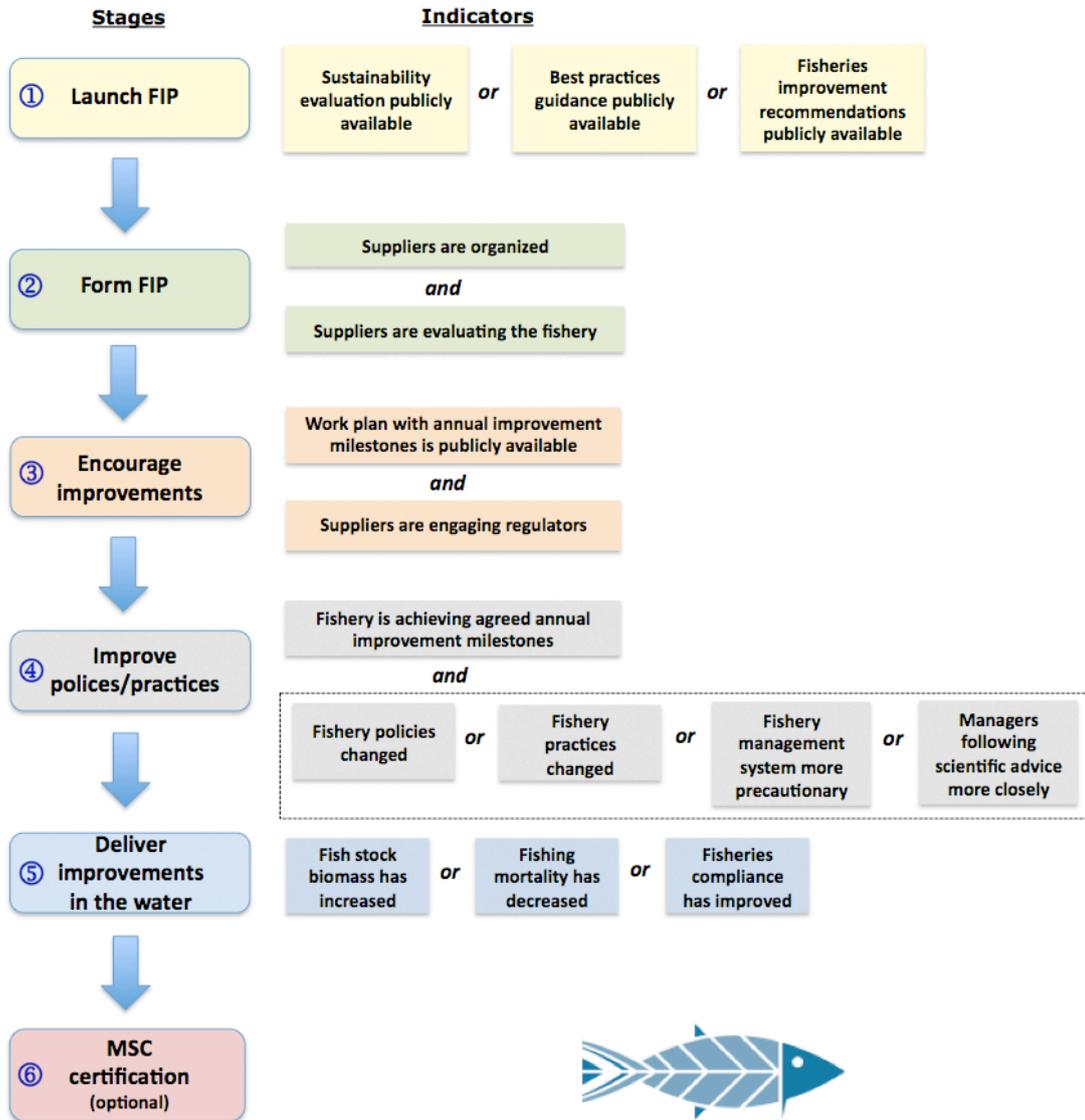
There are already many examples of successful FIPs around the world – examples can be found at:

<http://www.sustainablefish.org/main/fishery+improvement+partnerships>

If you would like to find out more about Fisheries Improvement Projects please contact Sustainable Fisheries Partnership at [info@sustainablefish.org](mailto:info@sustainablefish.org)

**Diagram 1**

**Fishery Improvement Project Process – Stages & Indicators**



Sustainable Fisheries Partnership

[www.fishsource.org](http://www.fishsource.org)

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